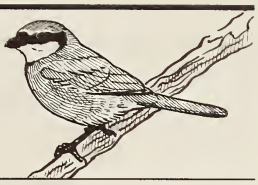
Discoveries



Temminck's Horned Lark *Eremophila bilopha*— a new species for The Gambia

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Les auteurs rapportent la découverte d'une Alouette bilophe *Eremophila bilopha* sur le terrain de golfe de Fajara, Division Occidentale, Gambie, le 23 février 2002. L'oiseau a été filmé en vidéo, photographié et décrit en détail. Ceci constitue la première mention pour la Gambie et l'Afrique subsaharienne. Bien que l'espèce soit généralement considérée comme sédentaire et seulement encline à un erratisme local, des égarés ont été notés à Malte, au Liban et au Yémen.

On the morning of 23 February 2002 we, together with a tour group and local bird guide Barry Mamadou, were birdwatching at the west end of Fajara golf course, Fajara, Western Division, The Gambia. Passing through a narrow area of *Neocarya macrophylla* bushes onto an open, sandy fairway with a sparse cover of grasses (Poaceae) and depauperate herbs (including *Hyptis suaveolens*, *Sida* spp, *Ipomoea* spp and *Nelsonia canescens*), BJS, who was just ahead of the group, exclaimed that he had found a Temminck's Horned Lark *Eremophila bilopha*. The ease with which this species can be identified at first overruled any thoughts of whether such a species should be at this location. Common sense and caution caused a recap as MDC and the rest of the group located the bird, which was feeding no more than 3 m in front of BJS. It was indeed a Temminck's Horned Lark!

Over the next 30 minutes (and again more briefly subsequently) we studied the bird closely. BJS obtained several minutes of digital video of the bird, while Derek Lamer took several digital photographs. During this period the following notes were made by MDC and BJS. Others searching for the bird later the same day were unable to relocate it.

Description

Medium-sized lark, clearly belonging to the genus *Eremophila*, with a rather plain body and strikingly marked black-and-white head pattern. Entire upperparts pale sandy-buff with slight pinkish tone, becoming more orange-buff on tertials. Underparts paler, off-white, with pale sandy wash to lower breast-sides and flanks. Primaries brown; tail predominantly brown with whitish outertail feathers and sandy-buff central feathers. Upper breast marked by a broad, dark black band, with a narrow off-white band below. Entire chin and throat white; forehead, supercilium and much of ear-coverts white; black band extending narrowly over bill, broadly through the eye and across malar region and fore ear-coverts, forming a broad, black 'bandit mask', turning down into a broad moustachial. The black area did not meet the black breast-band and was more extensive around the eye than is typical in Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*. A narrow black band, broadest at front of crown, extended back across crown-sides, terminating in a pair of narrow 'horns', one either side of head. Bill and legs grey-black, the former rather fine.

Elimination of any possible confusion species was easy given such a distinctive bird. Horned Lark is the only likely confusion species but the North African taxon *E. a. atlas* (the only remotely possible form in The Gambia) has a yellow tone to the pale areas of the face, and darker, less uniform upperparts. Adult male sparrow-larks of the genus *Eremopterix* have more extensive black, covering most of the underparts, as well as much heavier, sparrow-like bills.

Nothing concerning the bird's plumage led us to draw any conclusions about its age or sex, though the generally well-defined head pattern suggested that it was not a first-winter. The plumage generally exhibited considerable wear, but this is perhaps typical of species that inhabit open, sandy areas where wind-borne sand particles can cause extreme abrasion. This was particularly noticeable on the tail where the central pair of feathers was almost reduced to a shaft.

Behaviour

Very approachable, although the bird retained a greater distance when the entire group of 14 people was observing it. At one point, MDC was able to approach to within 1.5 m as it continued to feed. Such behaviour is often typical in species from desert areas where contact with humans is either infrequent or where human behaviour has not had adverse impacts. This individual fed actively, shuffling with rapid, short steps, with the body mostly held low to the ground. It was impossible to determine individual food

items but both insect and plant food appeared to be taken. The bird was faithful to a very sandy area of sloping ground, although a pedestrian route across the golf course was close by.

Status and distribution

Temminck's Horned Lark is generally considered a resident, prone to occasional dispersal. Accidentals have been reported outside of the species' usual range, between north-west Mauritania across North Africa to north and east Arabia, Syria, and east and south-west Iraq[1–3], in Malta, Lebanon[2] and Yemen[4]. This appears to constitute not only the first record for The Gambia, but also for anywhere in Africa south of the Sahara.

References

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Second confirmed record of Forbes's Plover *Charadrius forbesi* for The Gambia

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En février 2002 un Pluvier de Forbes *Charadrius forbesi* a été observé sur la côte gambienne. Ceci ne constitue que la deuxième mention confirmée pour le pays. L'examen de specimens au Royaume Uni semble indiquer qu'il s'agissait d'un adulte en plumage internuptial.

Forbes's Plover *Charadrius forbesi* occurs in savannas of western Central Africa[2], breeding in rocky upland areas of Nigeria in March–August[3] and July–August in Ghana[5]. It is known to move short distances from its breeding grounds and to undertake longer journeys, although the routes involved are not understood[2]. The only confirmed record from The Gambia is of one at Bansang (13°26'N 14°39'W) in Central River Division, on 23 November 1979[1,4]. There is also an unconfirmed January record from coastal Western Division, and records in south and east Senegal in February[1,6].

On 6 February 2002, GK and a small group of British birders spent a day with CB in Western Division of The Gambia. During mid-afternoon some of the group spent time watching Palearctic shorebirds on a muddy pool behind the beach at Tujering (13°19'N 16°47'W) in south Gambia on the Atlantic coast. The seasonal pool was bordered by vegetation dominated by *Tamarisk pentandra* and while searching through numbers of Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola* and Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*, GK saw a small wader alight and CB immediately identified it as a Forbes's Plover. CB has recent experience of the species from Guinea-Bissau and Guinea Conakry, both in October, in stonier, lateritic grasslands at higher altitudes. We obtained prolonged, close views of the bird in good light. The main question was the bird's age. A few wing feathers appeared to have pale fringes, which are just visible in Fig 1, suggesting that it may not have been a full adult. After c10 minutes the bird flew off, uttering a double call as it departed. On 10 February 2002 at 08.00 hrs CB and Paul Manners visited the same site and found the bird still present. It moved between two areas, the muddy pool and a drier part some 250 m away. PM took a series of photographs and CB obtained a short sound recording of the flight call.

On returning to the UK, GK visited the Natural History Museum (Tring) to examine skins of Forbes's Plover (35 specimens). About 50% had been collected in Nigeria, with most other records from other West African countries (Sierra Leone, Liberia, 'Gold Coast', 'British Cameroon' and Côte d'Ivoire), and two taken in 'north Rhodesia' and 'west Tanganyika' (country names within quotes appear as on the relevant specimen labels). The birds had been collected in most months, with the majority of the breeders taken in May. Many of the non-breeding adults, labelled as having been caught in December–February, had some pale feather fringes, especially on the secondaries and inner primaries, like those on the Gambian bird. The Gambian bird also had the following features that appear to eliminate the possibility of it being a juvenile (see Fig 1): no pale fringes to the mantle or scapular feathers, a black (not brown) breast-band and grey (not buff) face and throat. GK concluded that the observed bird was an adult in non-breeding plumage. The sexes are similar[7].